



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF PORTUGAL
TO THE OSCE

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Statement of the European Union in response to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, H.E. Dr. Ivo Sanader

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. the Prime Minister of Croatia, Dr. Ivo Sanader to the Permanent Council. We thank him for his comprehensive statement which we have listened to with great interest.

We should congratulate Croatia on the long and sometimes difficult path it has successfully followed in these fifteen years after joining the OSCE and signing the Helsinki Final Act. Now, ten years since the conclusion of the UN peacekeeping operation in Eastern Slavonia, the country itself actively contributes to peacekeeping activities in the OSCE region and beyond.

The European Union has recognized the country's progress by opening accession negotiations with Croatia in October 2005. The first stage of the negotiations, the so called screening process, has been completed. Negotiations on 12 out of 35 'chapters' have been opened. On two chapters, negotiations have been provisionally closed. Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) has continued largely without major difficulties.

The EU values the work Croatia is conducting in its capacity as the current Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation. Although continuity and coherence represent

the main features in the work of the current FSC Chair, we welcome Croatia's initiative to devote more attention to regional issues. We regard the chairmanship of Croatia as an opportunity to enhance co-operation and consolidation of stability in South Eastern Europe.

The EU considers Croatia an important factor for stabilisation in South East Europe and values its engagement in a wide range of regional activities and initiatives. Croatia has just completed a year as Chairman-in-Office of the South East Europe Co-operation Process, SEECP. Here it played a leading role in developing the necessary structures, notably the Regional Co-operation Council to assume regional ownership in light of the winding up of the Stability Pact. The regional Energy Summit in Zagreb hosted by Croatia in June 2007 is another example of Croatia's desire to work closely with the countries of the region. Issues of refugee return and integration also have an important regional dimension.

The EU acknowledges Croatia's good progress in meeting OSCE commitments over the last two years which resulted in 2006 in the conclusion of the Field Mission's activities in four areas of its mandate. This progress has been achieved notably as a result of the high level of cooperation between the Mission and the host country government throughout the past 11 years. In this respect, we value the development of the partnership working arrangement - "the Platform" - that brought together in a single structure the main stakeholders. We believe that this might serve as a useful model for other OSCE field operations in the region.

We believe that further progress on refugee return and the conduct of all war crime proceedings in Croatia should provide solid ground for the scheduled mid year review and a subsequent OSCE decision. We reiterate our view that any closure of the OSCE Mission in Croatia must be a success both for Croatia and for the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, we would like once again to thank H.E. the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Dr. Ivo Sanader, for addressing the Permanent Council today, and wish him and his country all the best for the challenging tasks ahead.

The Candidate Countries Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.